

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE PROPOSED CESSATION
OF NAVY AND MARINE CORPS TRAINING AT VIEQUES NAVAL TRAINING
RANGE**

Pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) implementing procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Department of the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared, and an Environmental Impact Statement is not being prepared, for the proposed cessation of training at the Vieques Naval Training Range (VNTR).

The EA has been prepared to assist the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) in deciding the continued use of the VNTR. Public Law (PL) 106-398, as amended by PL 107-107 provides that SECNAV is authorized to close the VNTR on the Island of Puerto Rico and discontinue training at the range only if he certifies to the President and Congress (1) that one or more alternative training facilities exist that, individually or collectively, provide an equivalent or superior level of training for units of the Navy and Marine Corps stationed or deployed in the eastern United States and (2) that the alternative facilities are available and fully capable of supporting such training immediately upon cessation of training on Vieques.

Should such conditions be met and SECNAV make a determination to cease training and close the VNTR, the legislation also provides specific direction on what operations to terminate and what facilities to close. The legislation directs that if a determination were made to close the VNTR, the Navy shall:

- terminate all Navy and Marine Corps training operations on the Island of Vieques;
- terminate all Navy and Marine Corps operations at Naval Station Roosevelt Roads (NSRR), Puerto Rico, that are related exclusively to the use of the training range on the island of Vieques by the Navy and Marine Corps; and
- close the Navy installations and facilities on the island of Vieques, other than properties exempt from conveyance and transfer (i.e., the relocatable over the horizon radar [ROTHR] site and Monte Pirata telecommunications site).

Further, should SECNAV make a determination to cease training and close the VNTR, the legislation also directs that upon termination of Navy and Marine Corps training operations on the island of Vieques, the Navy shall transfer, without reimbursement, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of Interior:

- the Live Impact Area (LIA) on the Island of Vieques;
- all Department of Defense real properties on the eastern side of the island that are identified as conservation zones; and

- all other Department of Defense real properties on the eastern side of the island.

Following the transfer of the property to the Department of Interior (DOI), future management of VNTR property would be determined by the DOI in accordance with the legislation which also directs the Secretary of Interior to administer the LIA as a wilderness area under the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131 *et seq.*) and deny public access to it, and to administer all remaining VNTR properties as wildlife refuges under the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*).

The proposed action evaluated in this EA is the cessation of Navy and Marine Corps training at the VNTR. The closure of the VNTR and transfer of property to DOI is directed by the legislation and is evaluated in the EA in general terms only, because the impacts of future management of the former VNTR property by DOI would be addressed by DOI when they propose development and implementation of their resource management plans for the property. Likewise, the potential impacts of conducting training elsewhere are being evaluated as those actions are identified.

The alternatives evaluated in the EA are the proposed action and the no action alternative. PL 106-398, as amended by PL 107-107, provides the SECNAV authority to determine whether to continue use of VNTR and its exclusively related facilities on NSRR or to cease operations. Currently, the Navy operates VNTR a maximum of 90 days per year using only non-explosive ordnance, which is the maximum level of training allowed on Vieques in accordance with the Presidential Directive issued on January 31, 2000. The SECNAV may decide either to continue training at VNTR at current levels or to discontinue training at VNTR. Therefore, this EA considers only the proposed action (cessation of training at VNTR) and the no action (continued training at VNTR) alternatives.

A decision to cease training has not been made by SECNAV, but should such a decision be made, it will be made considering the conclusions of this EA. The proposed action would not adversely effect the noise environment, air quality, hydrology, water quality, or terrestrial or marine resources. There would be no effect on threatened or endangered species, or on cultural resources that are listed or eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places. There would be no adverse impact on public health and safety regarding environmental contamination, as the Navy would perform appropriate remediation of hazardous waste contamination and conduct response actions, as appropriate, to address munitions and explosives of concern (MEC) at VNTR, consistent with future use objectives as directed and required under public law to protect human health and ensure public safety. Based on the information gathered during preparation of the EA, the Department of the Navy finds that the proposed cessation of Navy and Marine Corps training at the VNTR will not significantly impact the environment.

The EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) addressing this action are posted on the following website for review by interested parties: www.navyvieques.navy.mil. If you have any questions regarding the proposed action or how to obtain copies of the

FONSI or the EA, please contact Mr. Roberto Nelson, Public Affairs Officer for the Commander, Navy Region Southeast, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, FL 32212-0102, telephone: (904) 542-4032, fax: (904) 542-2413. A limited number of copies of the EA and FONSI will be provided for single-copy requests.

11/04/02

Dated

Thomas R. Crabtree

T. R. CRABTREE

Director

Shore Activities Readiness

U.S. Atlantic Fleet